

MISS SELINA LUE

and the Soap-box Babies

by MARIE THOMPSON DAVIES

Illustrations by Magnus G. Kettner

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Black hair and absolutely refused to leave her perch. In vain Miss Cynthia wooed with outstretched hands; Blossom held to her coign of vantage. A mean little feeling of gratification cooled the embarrassment in Mr. Kent's veins, and he said gently, too meekly perhaps: "Try lower down. Carrots will, I am sure, be more amenable to the—th—charm." And he rolled that very sleepy young gentleman into her outstretched arms.

A gleam of vexation was all the return he got for the trick he had played on her, and with a shrug of dismissal for both Blossom and him, Miss Cynthia turned and mounted the steps and made her way to the back of the store.

Rage, yes, actual rage was boiling within her as she laid the heavy baby on the pillow and threw the mosquito netting over him. The man's calm assumption of an intimate friendship with Miss Selina Lue and the babies and the grocery, and she had almost included herself, was unendurable. And Blossom, who had always been



"What's Your Friend Like?" Asked Miss Cynthia Interestingly.

overjoyed at her attentions, refusing to leave him for herself was the last straw.

But, even worse, could the man have meant to insinuate that she was consciously exerting a charm, for him, over Blossom's shoulder? The mere suspicion of such a thing settled matters! With her head in the air she walked to the front of the store and demanded a paper of tacks, which Miss Selina Lue hastened to wrap up for her, all unmindful of the proximity of the volcano.

"I do wish you didn't have to go, Miss Cynthia, honey. I was just counting on your setting with us awhile to get acquainted with Mr. Alan. He do talk so interesting about pictures and things we don't know nothing about. You can learn a heap from him. Why, Mr. Dobbs was a-saying jest last night that the things he tells us about are plumb educating. You must come down often to see him." And within a yard of Miss Selina Lue stood the helpless victim of her enthusiasm, Blossom in his arms swaying with sleep. The color of his face and ears and the set of his square jaw told the tale of his embarrassment which flared up into rage surpassing that which burned in the bosom of his adversary as she answered gently, very gently:

"Thank you, Miss Selina Lue; I am sadly in need of instruction in many things." And with her chin in the air and the suspicion of a tilt to her very classic little nose, Miss Cynthia swept out of the door without so much as a glance either to the right or the left.

"Now ain't she the sweetest thing!" exclaimed Miss Selina Lue as she leaned out of the door and watched the retreating figure with admiring eyes, all unconscious of the snub and the feelings of the snubbed. "She's jest that good and kind and loving that you couldn't hardly believe it, could you?"

"No, it's hard to believe that anybody could be—like that! Does she happen often in these parts?" answered Mr. Alan in a weak voice.

"Why, she's our Miss Cynthia from up on the hill—you know the big house with the white pillars and the long walks with box scrubs on each side. Her ma, Mis' Jackson Page, owns all this bluff and most of the land 'twixt here and the edge of town, and she is one of the first families though we all do come here from Adam and Eve. They ain't rich, because the city took a notion to grow out west of the University, and here we are left jest high and dry except for the car line which runs cars only when it can't get outen it. Mr. Jim Peters is conductor on one of 'em and Mr. Flarity is motorman on the other, and they don't make but six trips a day. We are all a-hanging on here on 'count of the boat landing and some of the men a-running on the river. Looks like prosperity's kinder shyin' at us, fer Mis' Jackson Page can't sell a foot of her land for a decent price, and she's jest downright land-poor, as the saying is."

"Is Mr. Flarity the Flarity who is the owner of Carrots and his brother?" asked Mr. Alan. He had deposited Blossom on the counter and she had

immediately curled up in a little bunch and plunged into the depths of sleep. He seated himself on the steps as he questioned Miss Selina Lue about the parental history of the twins—anything to get his mind off the scornful lady of the Hill mansion and give his ears a chance to cool down.

"Yes, and he is the most misfortunate man I ever did know about some things. His wife have had twins twice, and a tapeworm, and now she's gone to the hospital to stay three months to get cured of it. The poor thing wouldn't go until I promised to invite the babies for a visit while she were away. All the others are dead is what makes her nervous about these." Miss Selina Lue was so busy dusting the row of bluing bottles that she failed to see the effect of her naive revelations of the domestic situation in the Flarity household. "Flarity's a mothering sort of a man and he comes by and gits the twins after eight o'clock and takes them home for the night and leaves them on the back steps with the cat when he has to go on the very early morning runs. I go out and git them right away as soon as I can slip on some clothes."

"Does Miss Clemmie spend the night?"

"Oh, no—Mis' Simmons don't bring her over till after ten. She takes the ten-forty car into where she washes dishes for the Women's Exchange lunch. She has to stay until almost sundown, and comes home dead-beat. I don't want to say anything hard of Mr. Simmons, but it do seem he uses his family keelless like on a good salary."

"What," inquired Mr. Alan from the doorstep, "does the brute do?"

"Well, I wouldn't skeerfully call him a brute, I think," said Miss Selina Lue, as she shook out her duster and began on the shelf of canned tongue. "He runs a laundry wagon and he says it is a advertisement for the house for him to be a stylish dresser, but I can't see why the house has to have his pants pressed every morning and have him wear purple socks and tan shoes, when his wife is all drug out with trying to piece along and keep going. Sometimes I think it must be vanity in Mr. Simmons, and vanity in a man is like a turkey gobbler a-strutting in November."

"What about vanity in the ladies, Miss Selina Lue? You surely don't approve of that?"

"Now, Mr. Alan, you're mad at what I said about the men and are trying to git even with me." And Miss Selina Lue smiled over her shoulder at him. Miss Selina Lue's smile was like a broad beam of sunshine on a summer morning. "Don't you know the Lord wouldn't have gave women folks shiny curls, cheeks pink like a peach, fingers plump beautiful and eyes blue as the wild violets on the creek, like Miss Cynthia there, lesssen he intended to excuse them some fer being proud?"

"I don't believe he would quite stand for that amount of pride and grudge Mr. Simmons the purple socks," murmured Mr. Alan over his cigar in careful sotto voce, and immediately steered Miss Selina Lue off the disturbing topic of her friend's perfections.

"Anything interesting in the family histories of the other two soap boxes, Miss Selina Lue? It seems the thing on the bluff to know all about your neighbors, and my intimacy with your kiddies grows apace." There was a winning wholesomeness in Mr. Alan's voice that struck a kindred note in the soul of Miss Selina Lue, and she revealed in the unobscuring of herself to him. His dark eyes shone with interest and his straight mouth had an unexpected quirk in the left corner, easily interpreted as indicative of a sense of humor.

"Well, Pattie Tyne, the little one that can't hardly set up good yet, is jest so to speak a transient, as her ma have gone on a visit to her sister over to Union City. After she had got the other five ready to go, there jest wasn't nothing to fix Pattie up in fitten for a visit, so she left her with me. I wash the blue gingham out of nights



"What About Vanity in the Ladies, Miss Selina Lue?"

and piece out with a dress of Blossom's when it's needed bad. Looks like Mis' Tyne dreads the sewing machine and a bolt of caliker like they was typhoid smallpox."

"And last, but not least, tell me the tale of Blossom, the lady of my heart, the only person who really appreciates me for my true worth, which is peppermint candy in limited quantities and a shoulder cushioned in brawn and exalted in height. Blossom is a lady of discernment and has the courage of her predilections."

"Mr. Alan," said Miss Selina Lue as she sat down on the step by him and, picking up the little white calico bonnet he had let drop off the nodding head of the lady in question, began to plait the ruffle with caressing fingers. "They ain't many people I would tell the story of her to. One way or another, I have shut up every soul on the bluff as has asked me. Of course Miss Cynthia knows, fer people can't help talking pitifulness to her, but the rest jest found her here, and that is all they need to know."

"It was a year ago last Christmas it happened to me and Charity to find her. About dark when I was busy to death doing up supper truck—as you see, that's my busiest time of day—a girl come in here I never saw before and she looked wild and white. She carried a bundle in her arms, but I never suspected anything, so I jest sold her a box of crackers and she went on out. Then I plumb forgot her, as I oughten to have done, for she wasn't happy-seeming, and sich as she oughter be on my mind."

"Miss Selina Lue, please forgive me for asking. Perhaps I ought not to know." And Mr. Alan caught one string of the limp little bonnet and curled it tenderly around his finger. "I really do—love the little mite, if that's any excuse for my—"

"Mr. Alan, that's a excuse for everything in the world and Heaven above! When you give it, you've done gave the password to Kingdom Come and I ain't a-holding back the confidence of my heart from one as can speak it. It ain't the baby's fault no way, that I found her laid in Charity's stall, what is like a manger we have both heard on many a time. Charity had a new calf then, what I am in the habit of turning in with they mother on cold nights if the milk do run short in the morning, and that's what saved the child's life. Charity had crowded her spotted baby in a corner of the stall to keep it warm and had hung her head down over Blossom and her own baby in such a manner as to hover them both—and there I found her. I wisht I knowed where that wild-eyed girl-mother is a-wandering, lonesome and unhappy."

"She chose the place to leave the baby—wisely," said Mr. Alan, as he walked over to the counter and slipped his finger into the curled, pink, little hand which grasped it firmly even from the depths.

"Yes, you can always put dependence in the sense and good feelings of a cow," answered Miss Selina Lue with sweet unconsciousness. "Did you ever think what a noble life they lead—always a-giving for other people who don't show no more appreciation than a bucket of bran and a little water? If oxes and asses was there, I want to think a cow helped to watch over him that night. It makes me feel easier about Mary; fer cows they knows things same as humans."

CHAPTER III.

How Miss Selina Lue Came to the Bluff.

"I don't hold with thinking up bad happenings onto people, for sometime it might kinder hit 'em on some blind side we don't know about and take."

—Miss Selina Lue.

"Now," said Miss Selina Lue with a sigh of relief, "every string is tied up. The camphire held out fine and there are two pink rags left. Everybody forget all about the yellow-jackets and put your mind on the making of the lemonade. I'll get the lemons." And as she spoke she rose from the top step and started into the grocery. She paused for a moment and ran her eyes over the group huddled along the steps, while laughter strove with sympathy in her expression.

Just at that moment Miss Cynthia came down the Hill with her rose hat swinging in her hand and her curls a-ruffle in the breeze. She paused and took in the maimed and bandaged crew of youngsters with round-eyed amazement. And a picture of wholesale catastrophe they presented! Bessie sat on the top step. Tied neatly around his head was a huge white bandage, from which his freckled face peered with swollen solemnity. Ethel Maud drooped on the corner of the step below and nursed a red and enlarged little wing that had been an ear when last Miss Cynthia had beheld it. Luella Kinney choked back sobs with an abnormally fat thumb which she kept fast in her mouth, seemingly deriving comfort therefrom. Around one ankle was tied a blue gingham rag, which set off the pink bit that swathed one of Ethel Maud's brown little feet. Several thin knees had seemingly doubled on their mates in matter of size. The rest of the congregation had suffered with more or less poignancy. And an aroma of mingled tears and camphor rose from the steps.

"Why—why!" gasped Miss Cynthia, "was there a—a cyclone?"

"Oh, no," answered Miss Selina Lue cheerfully. "Just a little yellow-jackets' nest that made a mistake to get mad at the children. They have jest forgot all about it, fer we was jest about to make a whole water bucket full of lemonade. Nice day, ain't it, fer drinkin' sich as lemonade?" Miss Selina Lue bestowed a significant glance on Miss Cynthia, as she spoke, which was very enlightening as to her rational method of treating the hornet cyclone. Miss Cynthia hastened to lend the weight of her mental in-

fluence to that of her friend, for she saw that her consternation had started a faint echo of sobs.

"Yes, indeed it is," she affirmed enthusiastically. "I feel as if I could drink several glasses myself. Somebody must draw the water for it right from the well."

"Yes, Bessie can do that while you and Ethel Maud and Luella roll the lemons. There are the glasses to hunt up, and everybody must git ready to help squeeze."

And for at least a half-hour the front of the grocery teemed with cheerful activity. If sharp little pains occasionally intruded themselves, they found no encouragement from the busy drink-mixers, who squeezed and stirred and slopped and drank to their hearts' content. After they had themselves consumed the third concoction from the yellow rinds, they conceived the idea of adding sugar and water still again and carrying the bucket down for the refreshment of Mr. Leeks, who was a dear friend, to be remembered at what they considered an early stage of the lemonade game.

"Lands alive!" said Miss Selina Lue as she sank on the top step and watched the last scampering pair of bare feet and fluttering rags disappear down the hill, "that's almost the worst ruckus we ever had on the bluff! I was afraid they would all cry themselves sick before I could git they thoughts switched."

"Yes," answered Miss Cynthia as she seated herself beside Miss Selina Lue, exhausted and panting with the efforts she had made in their behalf. "It was pretty bad, and I was out of the direct path of the hurricane. How did you weather the full force?"

"Well, you know," answered Miss Selina Lue. "I've got 'em trained some. I always did believe that courage is jest to keep going and fergit the pain. I don't hold with making light of suffering, but if distractions will help to ease along, I for one say make a bucket of lemonade."

"Lots of people in the world are agreeing with you on that line, Miss Selina Lue," answered Miss Cynthia as she laughed up into the kind eyes above her.

"Course common sense makes people think alike from Tennessee to Jericho, but ain't it funny how little



"That's Almost the Worst Ruckus We Ever Had on the Bluff."

of it is let loose all along the road? I wisht we coulder had more of it in that mothers' meeting we had this morning, which is the cause of all this cyclone-trouble, along of letting the children git away and into a mess of horns while we talked about how to raise 'em."

"A mothers' meeting?" questioned Miss Cynthia in astonishment.

"Oh, she didn't mean any real harm. She was sent out by some kinder foolish Women's Union. She came into the grocery about nine o'clock this morning. I got a chair quick fer her to puff and rest in from the hill-climb. She looked kinder feeble and pinched, but my! she had fire in her eyes and she bet up when she talked."

"Did she come up for—missionary purposes?" demanded Miss Cynthia indignantly.

"Oh, yes, I reckon that is the way she put it to herself. And it was kind of her, but it did set back the work, as this is wash-day. Mis' Dobbs was glad enough to leave her tubs and come over to Mis' Peters's and set and listen 'stid of rubbing, but Mis' Kinney was as put out as could be."

"And what did she have to impart to you about child culture?" Miss Cynthia again demanded.

"Oh, they was all good enough little receipts that most women what has owned a baby a week finds out for herself; but I was glad ter see them took notice of and writ up in fine talk in a book, 'cause how do we know that some woman, some day, might not need sich? I was glad ter have Mary Ellen hear her tell over a few things I have said to her time and time again."

"Well, it makes me indignant to think of her—"

"But wait until I tell you about the husband experiences she began on. The way she talked sounded kinder like training a lion or tiger by a kindness method. I seen Mis' Kinney begin to cawl and I got right uneasy. You've saw Mis' Kinney when her temper has riz. She stood up and cornered that left eye of her'n."

"Did I understand that you was—"

"Bessie Bumpas or Mistress Bumpas, ma'am?"

"I am Miss Bumpas," answered the lady, with vinegar and persimmons mixed in her voice.

"Well," said Mis' Kinney, "then I excuse your remarks. Child, some woman have been joking with you about her men-folks. You wasn't talking about no United States hus-

band at all; it must a-been some Chinese man your friend was complaining over. I was surprised how mild and patient Mis' Kinney was handling her remarks."

"When women are content to sit with folded hands and let—" The lady got so far, but Mis' Kinney interrupted her in a very unpolite way. "Set with folded hands," she kinder repeated, dazed-like. "Why, I make mine do the work of four any day, and if Mr. Kinney was to come home and fine me a-setting cross-handed—"

But here the ruckus began, and I heard it coming down the street litchy-split. Ethel Maud was in the lead, but the others was close behind, and the yelling was like what you call it, a cyclone."

"Oh, how delicious!" gasped Miss Cynthia as she shook with laughter at the picture. "What did Miss Bumpas do?"

"Honey, I don't know. I didn't have time to see. Mis' Peters says she didn't wait for the ten-fifty car, but took to the Hill. This is the first breathing minute I have had since. And now I'm worrying 'cause she will think we haven't got a bit of manners."

"Why, you couldn't help the—cyclone!"

"Yes, I know, but you oughter be thankful fer kindnesses done to you, whether they are caps that fit or not. Mis' Kinney was riled and—but it's easy for me to talk who ain't got no husband to bit and bridle like she recommended and—Lands alive! it is almost dinner-time and not a thing on the stove. Set still, honey, while I bring the beans out here to string."

Miss Cynthia sat for a few minutes, in smiling silence, and then there floated down from the barn a tempest-whistled rendition of an Alma and Miss Cynthia stiffened, rose, and called a hasty good-by to Miss Selina Lue, who came to the door to look up the street after her.

"I do wonder why she had to go so suddenlike," she said to herself as she turned again toward the kitchen. Just then Mr. Alan entered the back door with Carrots wriggling in his hands. He was a whimpering bunch of the exact hue of that part of the mother-earth inclosed in the garden fence.

"Lands alive, Mr. Alan, did Carrots turn over his box at last?" exclaimed Miss Selina Lue as she plucked him by the neck of his apron and set him down by the sink.

"He was squirming over the geography of the garden paths when I found him," answered Mr. Alan with a laugh.

Carrots gave one sleepy little purr and rolled over on the floor for a nap.

"Well, such a time as we have been a-having!" remarked Miss Selina Lue, as Mr. Alan followed her to the front of the grocery and they both seated themselves in reach of the river breeze. She began to snap the beans busily.

"I heard about it," answered Mr. Alan, "and I had a drink of lemonade."

"That bucket saved a-marry of yells and soothed a heap of pain," answered Miss Selina Lue with a laugh. "But, dearie me, I wonder if Miss Cynthia coulder been stung by one of them yaller-jackets as a reason for leaving so sudden! I saw one crawling around the steps a little while ago. I've just thought of it." Miss Selina Lue's hands were idle from anxiety as she peered up the Hill with distress in her usually serene eyes.

"No," said Mr. Alan calmly. "I don't think it was a yellow-jacket that caused her flight. It might have been a gray serge," he added under his breath.

"Well, I jest feel too uneasy to rest calm until I find out," said Miss Selina Lue. "You, Bessie, come here a minute! I want you." And she hallooed the wounded hero as he struggled up the road with the empty bucket.

"You ought to teach her to negotiate pain as you do the kiddies," was Mr. Alan's vindictive remark, which failed to lodge in Miss Selina Lue's kind mind; but he seemed glad when Bessie enthusiastically consented to run up to the Hill Mansion to take a bottle of camphor and find out about the possible accident. He went so far as to hand him a dime, with the entreaty that he hurry and relieve the anxiety of—Miss Selina Lue. He even stood and watched impatiently the rag-beturbaned head of the messenger, which seemed to crawl up the hill like a big white snail.

"I know I'm foolish," said Miss Selina Lue as she began on the beans again. "I don't hold with thinking up bad happenings onto people, for sometime it might kinder hit 'em on some blind side we don't know about and take, but that child is jest the kern' of my heart. She is one of the whys of me, Miss Cynthia is, since I come to the bluff."

"Why, I thought you had always been—the bluff, Miss Selina Lue," said Mr. Alan, anxious to turn her thoughts from her favorite topic of conversation. He bore no malice, but a snub is likely to bring return ripples of resentment; and that wretched mischievous smile—his ears began to burn from reflex action.

"Oh, no, indeed, I've only been here eight years," answered Miss Selina Lue, and her eyes rested on the far dim hills across the river. "Just eight years and two months, for Ethel Maud was borned the night after I got here."

"How on earth did they get along without you before you came?" asked Mr. Alan with sincerity in his tone.

"Well, they wasn't so many babies on the bluff then—jest Bessie, though he was a mighty poor specimen when I took a hand with him. They've kept a-comin' along in bunches ever since, bless 'em!"

"How did you happen to come—to

"them?" asked Mr. Alan gently, for he saw that Miss Selina Lue's mind was back in the past.

"Yes," she answered softly, "it do look like the little unborn things called me—a-setting lonesome up on a side of one of the hills over in Warren county. I didn't have nothing but some land, a empty home—and a full graveyard over by the garden wall. It was jest about sundown one day and I was a-fixin' round the graves—the wild v'lets was a-bloomin' on Adoniram's fer the first time—when I looked up and seen the light of glory on the hills. And somehow, I don't know, but all of a sudden, the grieving love in me turned into love of God that He jest poured down into my heart, and I was so filled with it that it hurt me not to be a-giving some of it out to other folks. The next day I sold the land and home to Cousin Dave Elkins, and hitched up and started down to where I could find folks to need me."

"I'm surprised you got this far," said Mr. Alan, his voice a bit husky as he looked into Miss Selina Lue's face of beautiful tenderness.

"Well, it was with a-many a stop," she answered as her face broke up into a shower of smiles. "It took two full weeks to make the seventy miles, and if ever a woman found things a-waitin' to be did it was me as I come along the road." Miss Selina Lue laughed reminiscently.

"Tell me about it, please do," begged Mr. Alan like a small boy wheedling for an adventure tale.

"Well, let me see! I was all hitched and ready to start by sun-up. I had been real stern with myself about leaving 'most everything behind me, packed up in a corner of the garret, but I never had any mind not to drive Charity's mother down before me, 'cause no matter where a body lands, now is a convenience to have along."

Mr. Alan laughed and moved a step nearer. "How far did you get that first day?" he inquired.

(to be continued.)

ORDER OF PUBLICATION.

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA:

At Rules held in the Clerk's Office, of the Circuit Court of Mason County, West Virginia, on Monday, the 5th day of December, 1910, the following order was entered:

Ruby Alexander,

vs.

Wm. H. Alexander,

In Chancery.

The object of the above entitled suit is to obtain a divorce from the bonds of matrimony, by the plaintiff from the defendant. And it appearing by affidavit filed in the papers of said cause, that the defendant, Wm. H. Alexander, is a non-resident of the State of West Virginia, it is ordered that he do appear here within one month after the first publication of this order, and do what is necessary to protect his interests.

A Copy Teste:

CHAS. BUXTON, Clerk.
Somerville & Somerville,
Sols.

The State of West Virginia,
To the Sheriff of Mason Co. Greeting:

We command you that you summon William H. Alexander if he be found in your bailiwick, to appear before the Judge of our Circuit Court for the County of Mason, at Rules to be held in the Clerk's office of said Court on the first Monday in December, to answer a Bill in Chancery exhibited against him in our said Court by Ruby Alexander, and unless he shall answer said bill within one month thereafter, the Court will take the same as confessed and decree accordingly, and have then there this writ.

Witness: Chas. Buxton, Clerk of our said Circuit Court, at the Court House, this 29th day of November, 1910, and in the 48th year of the State.

Teste: CHAS. BUXTON, Clerk.

NOTICE TO TAKE DEPOSITIONS.

To Wm. H. Alexander, take notice, that on the 7th day of January, A. D. 1911, between the hours of 9 o'clock a. m., and 6 o'clock p. m., at the law office of Somerville & Somerville, Point Pleasant, West Virginia, I will take the deposition of Oma Alexander, Gus Warner, Ruby Alexander, and others, to be read in evidence in my behalf in a certain suit in chancery now pending in the Circuit Court of the county of Mason, and State of West Virginia, in which I am plaintiff, and you are defendant.

If from any cause the taking of said depositions shall not be commenced on that day, or if commenced shall not be completed on the day aforesaid, the same shall be continued from day to day, or from time to time, at the same place and between the same hours, until the same shall have been completed.

RUBY ALEXANDER,

By Counsel.

Somerville & Somerville,
dec. 14-4w. Sols.

Playing Fair.

"Men hunt lions and tigers," explained mother, "because they kill the poor sheep." "If that is the case," rejoined Joe, "why don't they get busy and hunt the butchers, too?"